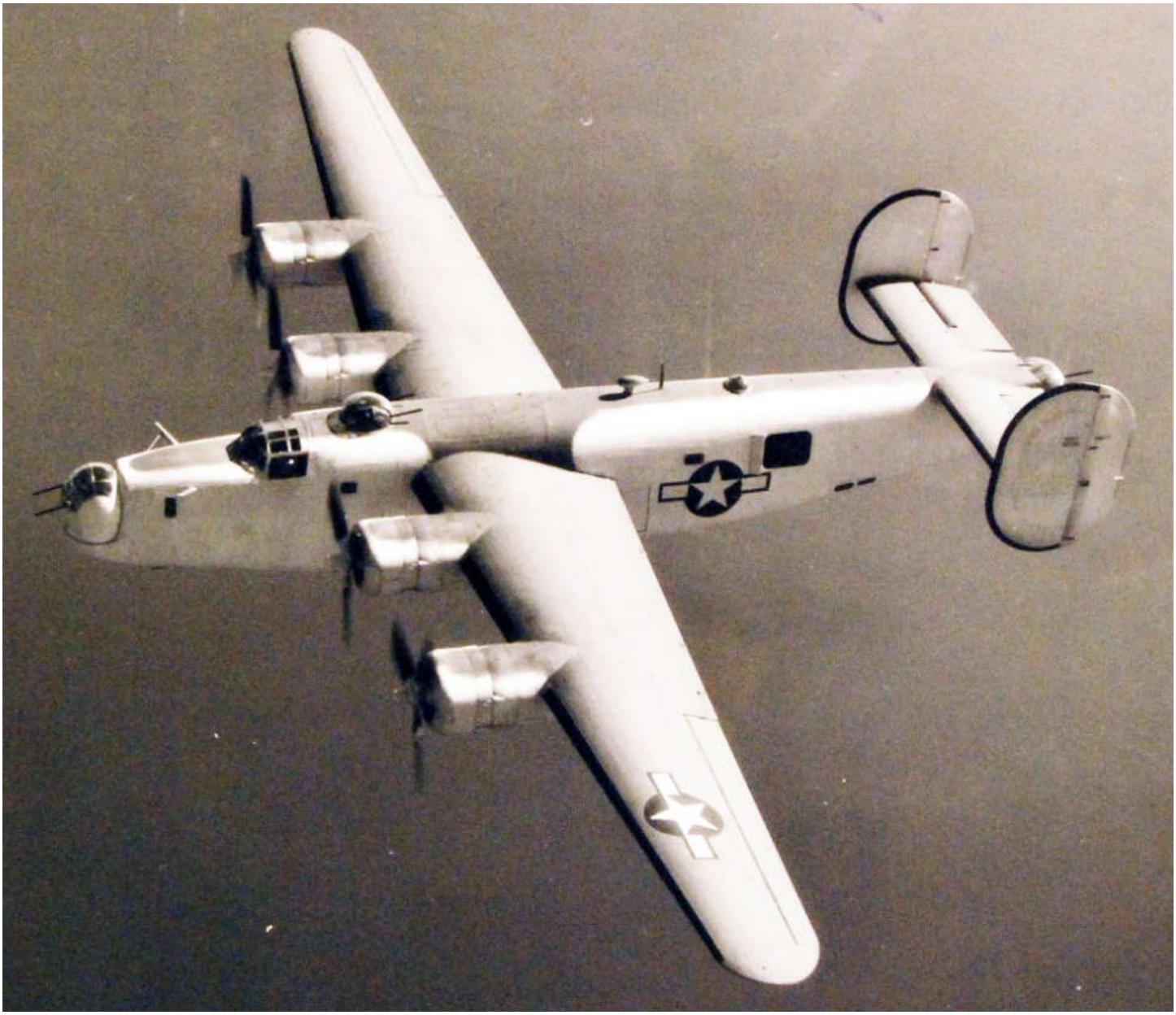
Palomar Mountain Airplane Crashes

Peter Brueggeman 2026

MAY 30, 1944

On May 31, 1944, the San Diego Union reported on an airplane crash over what is now Conifer Road east of Pedley Valley [1]:

> Palomar Crash Kills 12 Fliers
>
> Wildcat Fighter, Liberator Collide
>
> Four navy officers and eight enlisted men were killed when a Wildcat fighter plane and a navy Liberator bomber crashed in mid-air over Palomar mountain while on routine training flights yesterday afternoon. The plane collision was observed by the U.S. forest service lookout on Palomar mountain, and an ensuing brush fire was seen by lookouts on Black mountain and on Boucher hill nearby. Palomar lookouts said the planes were flying low and appeared to be maneuvering. The accident occurred 3 miles south of the famed Palomar observatory, the 11th Naval district disclosed. Navy ambulances were rushed to the scene, but all aboard were dead. Eleven men were aboard the bomber and one in the fighter. Names of the men killed were withheld pending notification of the next of kin.
>
> After colliding in mid-air, the planes fell 200 yards apart and burst into flames, which started a brush fire that swept 12 acres. An ambulance and first-aid crew from the U.S. forest service rushed to the scene, but there were no known survivors. Practicing navy planes usually fly 2000 feet above Palomar mountain, the forest service reported. Lee A. Farnsworth jr., in charge of the Palomar observatory, said the planes were flying low and it appeared to him that the fighter plane careened into the bomber. Impact of the crash apparently tore loose the wing of the small plane, Lee said, and the bomber immediately nosed over. Fire broke out in the bomber, and it became a plummeting torch as it fell earthward., Lee said, and some wreckage of the bomber was scattered 150 yards from the ship. Farnsworth, Gus Weber and Layton Walker, also employees of the observatory, rushed to the wreckage, but were forced to stay some distance for a time because of exploding bullets.



U.S. Navy Patrol Bomber PB4Y-1, "Liberator" … July 1944 [3]

U.S. Navy Wildcat fighter [4]

On May 31, 1944, the Daily Times-Advocate of Escondido reported [2]:

> Airplane Crash Kills 12 Fliers On Palomar Mt.
>
> Four navy officers and eight enlisted men were killed when a Wildcat fighter plane and a navy Liberator bomber crashed in mid-air over Palomar mountain while on routine training flights Tuesday afternoon. The plane collision was observed by the U.S. forest service lookout on Palomar mountain, and an ensuing brush fire was seen by lookouts on Black mountain and on Boucher hill nearby. Palomar lookouts said the planes were flying low and appeared to be maneuvering. The accident occurred three miles south of the famed Palomar observatory, the 11th naval district disclosed. Navy ambulances were rushed to the scene, but all aboard were dead. Eleven men were aboard the bomber and one in the fighter. Names of the men killed were withheld pending notification of the next of kin.
>
> After colliding in mid-air, the planes fell 200 yards apart and burst into flames, which started a brush fire that swept 12 acres. An ambulance and first-aid crew from the U.S. forest service rushed to the scene, but there were

no known survivors. Practicing navy planes usually fly 2000 feet above Palomar mountain, the forest service reported. Lee A. Farnsworth jr., in charge of the Palomar observatory, said the planes were flying low and it appeared to him that the fighter plane careened into the bomber. Impact of the crash apparently tore loose the wing of the small plane, Lee said, and the bomber immediately nosed over. Fire broke out in the bomber, and it became a plummeting torch as it fell eastward, Lee said, and some wreckage of the bomber was scattered 150 yards from the ship. Farnsworth, Gus Weber and Layton Walker, also employees of the observatory, rushed to the wreckage, but were forced to stay some distance for a time because of exploding bullets.

The tragic accident was witnessed by Escondidans who report slight differences in the details, as given in the above from the San Diego Union. They estimated the height of the places at 2,000 feet when the collision occurred. Neither ship burst into flames until they hit the ground and both then caught afire and set fire to the surrounding grass and brush, they report. Fire-fighters were summoned from Valley Center and both fires were extinguished. Capt. L.T. Ward, on business on the mountain for the Fish & Game Commission, was one of the first to arrive at the scene of the two crashed planes.

On June 1, 1944, The Tribune-Sun reported [5]:

Mid-Air Crash Victims Named

With naval authorities today continuing investigation of the mid-air collision Tuesday over Palomar mountain of a navy fighter plane and Liberator bomber, resulting in the death of four officers and eight enlisted men, with no survivors, the names of those killed were announced as follows:

Lt. (jg) Robert E. Hermson, of Brookly, N.Y., pilot of the fighter plane
Killed in the bomber were:
Lt. (jg) Luke Sauder, of Lancaster, Pa.
Ens. Harold W. Hutmacher, whose wife, Mrs. Toni Hutmacher, resides at 4465 Boundary st.
Ens. James Paul Richardson, of Mansfield, O.
Thomas R. Shannon, air bomber 2c, of Easton, Pa.
Carlton B. Rowland, aviation machinist's mate 2c, of Petersburg, Va.
Clinton Fay Baker, aviation machinist's mate 3c, of St. Cloud, Minn.
William St. Clair McKinstry, aviation radioman 3c, of Fall River, Mass.
Donald L. Atkins, aviation ordnanceman 3c, of Pittsburgh
Robert Searight, seaman 1c, of Wakeman, O.
William Douglas Cordell, seaman 2c, of Niagara Falls, N.Y.

Columbiatique photo

Columbiatique photo

Columbiatique photo

On January 19, 1951, the Weekly Times-Advocate of Escondido reported [6]:

> Salvage Plane Wreckage
>
> For more than five years, the wreckage of the bomber and the fighter plane that collided with it in maneuvers over Pedley valley, has lain on the ridge beyond Kenyon's. Now the government has relinquished its claim in favor of R.S. Dorcon, a local rancher and J.M. Damuth of Yreka, who will sell the metal to smelters in Los Angeles.

On July 29, 1970, the Evening Tribune of San Diego reported [7]:

> Ray Wagner, a World War II aviation buff, is seeking details of the mid-air collision in 1945 of a fighter plane and a Navy Liberator bomber near Palomar Mountain. Official sources don't know the details or aren't telling, he says. Debris from the wrecks has never been removed, and recent exploration brought back a buckle from the pilot's seatbelt, still in the locked position.

On November 23, 1988, The Tribune newspaper of San Diego reported [8]:

> Discovery of flier's ring brings story full circle
>
> On a recent Sunday hike on Palomar Mountain, Rob Young lifted a log and in the dirt below it he discovered a Navy flier's high school ring. The find didn't seem significant at the time, but for a family in Minnesota, it has reopened a painful wound that had been closed for 44 years. The 10-karat gold ring apparently was torn off Minnesota-born Clinton Baker's hand right when the Liberator bomber he was riding in collided with a Wildcat fighter plane over Palomar Mountain on Memorial Day in 1944. The crash, which killed Baker and 11 other crewmen, scattered wreckage for 150 yards and started a fire that burned 8 acres of brush and scrub oak. Young, a 25-year-old Santee mechanic, spotted Baker's St. Cloud Tech senior ring while exploring the crash site with his girlfriend and his boss on Nov. 13. He took the ring home to his stepfather, Ray Wilson of Lakeside, who convinced him that "somebody out there would be very happy to have this back." That somebody is Larry Baker, the dead flier's 54-year-old brother. He had wondered what happened to the ring ever since the Navy returned his brother's personal belongings – but not the ring – to St. Cloud. With nothing but a hunch that the ring had to belong to a victim of the crash and some amateur detective work, Wilson traced the ring to the Baker family in Minnesota.

“It was such a shock. You should have seen the back of my neck… it was a real goosebumpy experience,” said Larry Baker in phone interview last night, as he described his reaction to the discovery. Wilson said the ring was black when it was found, as if it had been charred by the fire. But that color made it easier to read the engraving, he pointed out. Wilson has since polished the ring and with a magnifying glass, the barely visible letters on the face of the ring can be read – “St. Cloud Tech, 1942.”

Wilson has heated the ring to put it back to its original round shape. He said it appeared to have hooked something during the crash – a detail he said he was careful not to mention to Larry Baker when they spoke on the phone. It took only two days for Wilson to trace the ring to its original owner. The retired 54-year-old electrical mechanic said he made several calls to pinpoint the date of the crash and to get a list of victims. Locally, he called the Navy, the Army, the Air Force and a newspaper. But Wilson says it was his first call, to the St. Cloud Daily Times newspaper, that yielded the most information. Wilson asked a reporter there to check the paper’s archives to see if any local men died in the plane crash. Reporter John Hughes, who writes a column called “Silver Linings” for the daily made a call to the Stearns County (Minn.) Historical Society. Two days later, Wilson got a call from Larry Baker, the younger and sole surviving brother of Clinton Baker. The two men, who are the same age, have since chatted several times. Last night, Baker said he was “thrilled” that Wilson and Young took the time to trace the ring back to his family “instead of taking it to a pawn shop.” But he was quick to add that the find has awakened many sad memories he had consciously tucked away.

“It’s like taking a dusty book off the shelf that’s been there for 44 years … and all of a sudden you realize that there is an ending to it,” he said, apologizing for “a catch” in this throat. “They flew Clint’s body back and there was a burial here… but there never was a viewing,” he explained. “And because of that, my mother and I always felt there was never any finalization. We always hoped that one day, my brother would walk through the front door.” The ring’s discovery, he said, has put such hopes to rest. Of course, the story made all the local papers. And in many St. Cloud homes last week there was talk of “old Clint Baker,” who, had he survived the crash, would be 64 today.

One of those remembering Clinton Baker was Russ Clepper, a St. Cloud photographer, who also graduated from St. Cloud Tech in 1942, and who remembers ordering his class ring at the same time Clinton Baker ordered his. “I’m the first one to get harsh about people. But there is nothing negative you could say about Clinton Baker,” said Clepper yesterday in a phone interview from his studio. Clapper said having a class ring used to be

a “big deal” then, particularly to the girls who “waited for a boy to give them his so they could wear it around their neck.” But Clepper said he couldn’t recall Baker having had a “girl” special enough to justify parting with his ring. John Decker, an archivist at the Stearns County Historical Society, confirmed what many of Clinton Baker’s former classmates told The Tribune yesterday. Decker said after graduation, Clinton Baker enrolled at the University of Minnesota and played football “back when they had a good team.” Just a couple of months into his freshman year, on Nov. 7, 1942, the young man enlisted in the Navy.

Decker said Baker was trained as an aviation machinist and aerial gunner. He visited his family in St. Cloud on an eight-day furlough in November 1943, before he was transferred to San Diego, where he died six months later. Larry Baker was only 11 years old when his brother died, but he remembers the day his brother came home from school and showed the ring off to his parents. “The ring was always really important to my parents. They were never educated and so they made it a point to get each of their three sons a class ring,” he explained. “That’s why Clint made such a big deal about his in front of my parents. That’s just the kind of caring guy he was.”

And that, apparently, is the kind of guy that Larry Baker’s son, Clinton Jr., is, which is why Baker has decided to give his son the ring for Christmas. In a phone interview from his girlfriend’s house in Spearfish, S.D., where he is attending college, 21-year-old Clinton Baker said yesterday that he is touched by the gesture. “My father has only good memories of his brother. People have always told me that I took after him and I always took that as a compliment,” he said. Yesterday Wilson said he will fly to Minnesota next week and deliver the ring to Clinton’s father.

On May 26, 2018, the San Diego Union-Tribune reported [9]:

> TRIBUTE SALUTES WWII CREW
>
> Memorial placed at site of wreckage where a midair training collision killed dozen Navy personnel in 1944

Property developer Phil Boczanowski with some of the wreckage of a Navy plane that crashed in a World War II training accident that still lies on Palomar Mountain. A memorial was erected on the site in January.

A week before the D-Day invasion that heralded the defeat of the German army, a dozen young Navy men died over Palomar Mountain. The crews of a Wildcat fighter plane and Liberator bomber collided during a training exercise. News of the mid-air crash on May 30, 1944, was little noticed with the war raging on several continents. And over time, the details of what happened were largely lost, though parts of both planes have been strewn about the area ever since.

But a group of dedicated researchers, aided by the two men on whose property the debris has sat, last month paid tribute to the fallen Navy flyers with a bronze memorial and a family crucifix one of them had been given when he went off to war. The crash occurred roughly a mile-and-half east of the Palomar Observatory as a group of PB4Y-1 Liberator bombers were flying low and interacting with FM-2 Wildcat fighters who were doing mock intercepts.

“Tragically, that one FM-2 pilot misjudged and hit that airplane and that wiped out 12 people,” aircraft accident researcher Pat Macha said. “People don’t realize in the Second World War we lost almost 25,000 air men and women right here in the continental United States during routine training, testing and ferrying of aircraft.”

Phil Boczanowski shows the memorial on the Palomar Mountain property that he developed and where two military craft collided during a training exercise, killing 12 Navy men.

Back in December, a man named Paul Cimbron, a Rhode Island resident suffering from cancer, was on a mission to find a permanent home for a family heirloom. Ten years before he was born, Cimbron’s uncle, Aviation radioman Raymond L. Shovelton, went off to join the war. Just before leaving, he was given a two-foot-tall crucifix by his parish priest and nuns from St. Mary’s Cathedral in Fall River, Mass. Shovelton soon afterward would die inside the bomber.

“It hung in my grandmother’s house for years, then it went down to my mother’s house and then it ended up with me,” Cimbron said. When Cimbron retired two years ago, he started doing research. His goal was to find the crash site and have the crucifix placed there as a memorial to his uncle and the others who perished. He had little luck until finding a book written by Macha about historic plane crashes in San Diego County.

Macha knows more about air disasters in the Southwest than just about anyone. He is the founder of Project Remembrance, a volunteer group dedicated to helping next of kin who want to learn more about the loss of loved ones in aircraft accidents. When Macha heard from Cimbron, given

Cimbron's medical condition, he felt a sense of urgency. He knew where the plane crashed, but in the past had been unable to gain access to the private property. He called a Project Remembrance team member in Vista, Jamie Lievers, who penned about a dozen letters and drove to the mountain. He put the letters next to a locked gate leading deep into the mountain where a handful of cabins have been built.

"I made the case for us coming up there and surveying the wreck and leaving some sort of small memorial," Lievers said. "It was crazy, I drove up in the morning and left the letters and I got two calls within three or four hours from Mike (LaPlant) and Phil (Boczanowski)."

Boczanowski bought the land where the planes crashed around the turn of the century and developed 20 lots. LaPlant bought one of those lots and built a cabin. It sits right next to where most of the

"We've known about that aircraft wreckage for years," said LaPlant, a part-time Palomar Mountain resident. "I got that property in 2006, and we had heard some rumors that it was military, but absolutely nobody knew anything about it until we were contacted. It was really an eye-opener."

A team from Project Remembrance, with LaPlant and Boczanowski's permission, came to the mountain in early January and documented the site. They identified all the wreckage, placed the crucifix next to some of the bigger pieces, and held a moment of silence for those who passed so long ago.

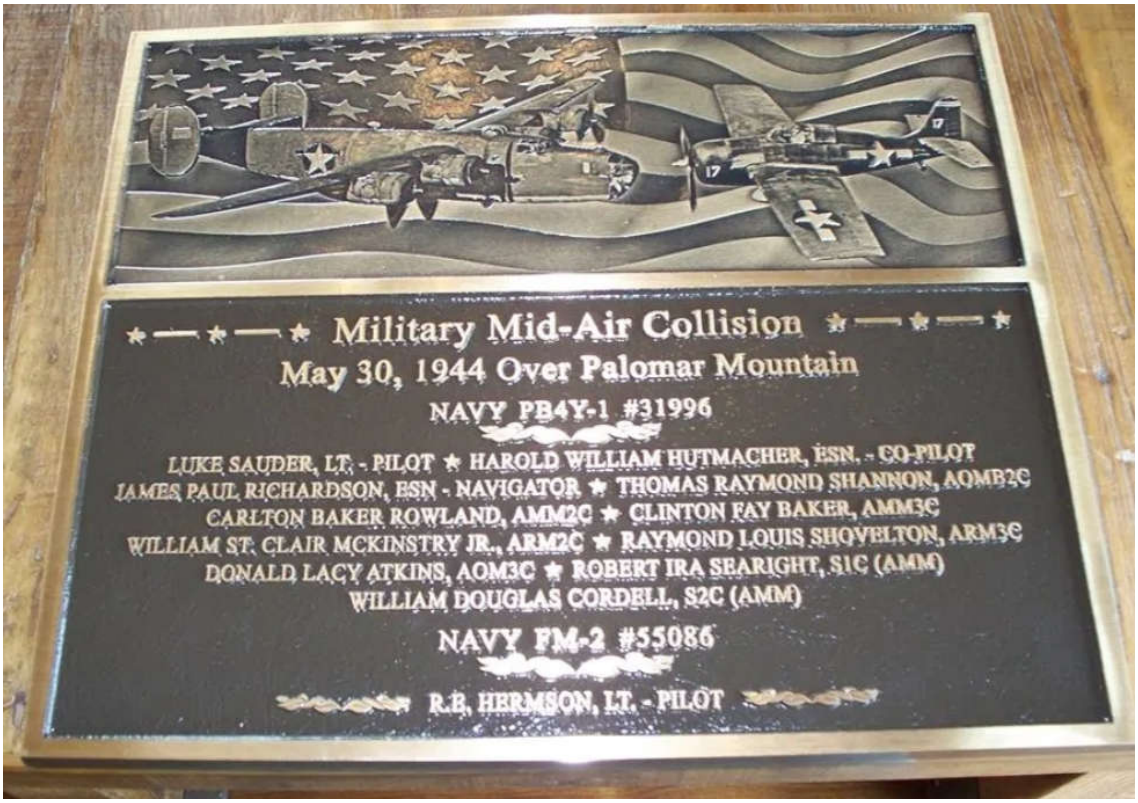
But LaPlant and Boczanowski wanted to do more. They commissioned the casting of a bronze plaque listing the name of the dead and placed it on a boulder at the site last month. Then, last week, Boczanowski constructed a case to hold the crucifix, protecting it from the weather, and placed it nearby.

"Life is precious," Boczanowski said. "I'm a very spiritual man and so is Michael and we wanted to show respect to the dead. It was the right thing to do."

"We thought it would be a nice tribute to honor the fallen airmen," added LaPlant.

Cimbron on Wednesday said he is thrilled the crucifix has finally made its way to where his uncle died. I'm beyond pleased; it's a fantastic thing," he said. "It wouldn't have happened without a bunch of good people out there."

A crucifix that had belonged to one of the doomed airmen is part of the memorial on Palomar Mountain


Military Mid-Air Collision
May 30, 1944 Over Palomar Mountain
NAVY PB4Y-1 #31996
LUKE SAUDER, LT. - PILOT ★ HAROLD WILLIAM HUTMACHER, ESN. - CO-PILOT
JAMES PAUL RICHARDSON, ESN - NAVIGATOR ★ THOMAS RAYMOND SHANNON, AOMB2C
CARLTON BAKER ROWLAND, AMM2C ★ CLINTON FAY BAKER, AMM3C
WILLIAM ST. CLAIR MCKINSTRY JR., ARM2C ★ RAYMOND LOUIS SHOVELTON, ARM3C
DONALD LACY ATKINS, AOM3C ★ ROBERT IRA SEARIGHT, S1C (AMM)
WILLIAM DOUGLAS CORDELL, S2C (AMM)
NAVY FM-2 #55086
R.B. HERMSON, LT. - PILOT

[10]

A side note to the story:

In 1988, a Lakeside man, Rob Young, was hiking in the area and exploring the crash site when he found a high school graduation ring beneath a log. The ring, it was later determined by Young's stepfather, Ray Wilson, had belonged to Aviation Machinist Mate Clinton Baker of St. Cloud, Minn., another member of the doomed bomber's crew. Wilson would later travel to Minnesota to give the ring to Baker's younger brother who in turn gave it to his son, Clinton, whom he had named after his long-lost brother.

December 18, 1957

On December 18, 1957, a six-engine U.S. Air Force Boeing TB-47B Stratojet bomber crashed on the Palomar Observatory grounds while approaching to land in weather at March Air Force Base in Riverside County, killing three crewmen [12].

Boeing B47 Stratojet bomber [11]

The accident investigation revealed that the aircraft was 8 miles off course, approaching to land in weather at March Air Force Base in Riverside County, and 5,000 feet below the minimums for the approach the aircraft was flying [12,14]. The aircraft grazed the dome of the 48-inch Schmidt telescope, causing some structural damage and hit the ground between the Schmidt telescope and the 200-inch Palomar telescope, about a quarter-mile from the Palomar telescope [14]. No observatory personnel were injured [12].

Killed were: Major Thomas Marlon Esmond, 37, Austin, Texas, aircraft commander; Col. Frank Wilby Ellis, 40, Covington, Kentucky, pilot; Capt. Frank Frederick Harradine, 27, Alameda, California, flight surgeon [14].

On December 19, 1957, the San Diego Union reported [15]:

> 3 Die As B47 Crashes on Mount Palomar
>
> Falling Bomber Sets Fire Near Observatory
>
> Air Force Jet Cuts Quarter-Mile Path Through Grounds
>
> A six-engine Air Force B47 Stratojet bomber yesterday crashed in flames on Palomar Mountain a fourth of a mile from the 200-inch "Big Eye," the world's largest telescope. The three-man crew was killed.

Wreckage of B47 Stratojet which crashed in flames near Palomar Mountain Observatory. Searching debris are W.F. Van Cleave, sheriff's deputy, left; R.H. Spies, highway patrolman.

The plane tore a quarter-mile swath through the observatory grounds, grazing the 45-inch Schmidt telescope building, crashing through the corner of a garage and coming to rest 30 feet from the observatory power plant. No one at the observatory was injured. One horse in a pasture was killed and another was burned so badly it had to be destroyed. Structural damage was minor and there was no damage to observatory instruments.

The bodies of the victims were recovered in the wreckage, which was scattered over a three-quarter mile area. The dead was identified as Co. Frank W. Ellis, the pilot, of Covington, Ky.; Maj. Time Esmond, the flight commander, of Austin, Tex., and Capt. Frank Harradine, a flight surgeon of Alameda, Calif. Col. Ellis was director of operations of the 15th Air Force. Personnel from the observatory put out a brush fire started by the crash, ducking live ammunition exploded by the flames. The crash occurred atop the 5,567-foot mountain plateau at 2:15 p.m. in the fog. The plane, attached to the 320th Bomb Wing at March Air Force Base, was on a training flight.

William C. Van Hook, acting supervisor of the observatory, was in the Schmidt telescope building when the plane tore past it. “I thought it was a jet passing overhead,” he said. “I heard a tinkle on the dome but thought it might have been a branch falling against the building.” The place tore off a corner of the garage of Byron A. Hill, observatory superintendent. Hill and his family had left on a vacation trip a few hours earlier. Hill owned the horses, which were in a pasture in the path of the plane.

The craft came to rest in a pile of boulders 30 feet from the observatory power house, which containing Harley Marshall, observatory office manager; his son, Bill; Charles Kearns and Robert Sears. “The building shook just like an earthquake had hit it,” Marshall said. “Then we heard an explosion. I ran out and the whole place seemed engulfed in flames. They were at least 100 feet high.” Marshall and his son hooked up hoses and played water on the wreckage. It still was smoldering six hours after the crash. “Live ammunition began going off, so we ducked down for a while,” Marshall said. “If I had stopped to think, we would have gotten out of there right then.”

The crash scene was half a mile northeast of the 200-inch Hale telescope. It is about 70 miles north of San Diego and 50 miles south of March Air Base, near Riverside. Major G.H. Seidlein from March base took charge of the investigation. Van Hook said there was no damage to the delicate observatory instruments. The observatory occupies a mile-wide area on the mountain top. It is operated by Caltech at Pasadena. It has an 18-inch telescope as well as the Hale and Schmidt instruments.

The plane was on a five-hour training flight. It has a range of 3,000 miles without refueling. A public information office at the air base said, “It could have been flying anywhere this side of the State of Washington at an altitude of 500 to 40,000 feet.” The plane was built by the Boeing Aircraft Co. Its six jet engines give it a top speed of more than 600 miles an hour. The normal crew consists of a pilot, co-pilot and navigator-bombardier. Additional men sometimes are carried on training flights. Observatory personnel said March Air Force Base plans often fly over the observatory. They said the sky yesterday had been blanketed by fog since noon.

Damaged section of Palomar Observatory building with parts of the crashed B47 Stratojet at right. Inspecting wreckage are M.M. Lloyd, U.S. Forest Service, left, and W.F. Van Cleave, a sheriff’s deputy.

Portion of Stratojet burns fiercely after observatory personnel and forest rangers had extinguished surrounding fire in heavy timber.

On December 24, 1957, the Daily Times-Advocate of Escondido reported [16]:

> Chance Saved Physicist in B-47 Palomar Crash
>
> PALOMAR MOUNTAIN – Friends on the mountain are still discussing the near tragedies which might have occurred last Wednesday when a March Field-based jet bomber crashed near the Hale Observatory here. Dr. Fritz Zwicky, on the world's top physicists, was driving the official observatory car that day. Had he not stopped to mail a post card, chances are that he would have been putting the car in a garage damaged by parts of the plane at the moment the accident occurred.
>
> A few hours before the crash, Mr. and Mrs. Byron Hill, observatory superintendent and his wife, were loading their trailer on the spot where the plane's motor dug an eight-foot wide hole. The Hills had just left the mountain on a vacation trip. The two horses which were killed were their riding horses.
>
> Harley Marshall and his son, Bill, were in the power house and just preparing to leave when the plane struck. Had they been in the open, they might have been struck by flying parts, friends say.

On August 19, 2021, the Valley Roadrunner reported that debris from the B-47 Palomar crash was donated to the Valley Center History Museum by Dr. David C. Greb, a Valley Center physician and a FAA-certified Aviation Medical Examiner, and was being placed on permanent public display there [17].

Gus Weber worked at the Observatory and took photographs of the wreckage there [13].

MARCH 21, 1983

On March 22, 1983, the San Diego Union reported [18]:

> Palomar Plane Crash Fatal For Utah Couple
>
> A small airplane crashed into a 200-foot canyon within a quarter mile of the Palomar Observatory during a heavy snowstorm yesterday, killing both occupants. Identified as the occupants of the Cessna 170 were Tom Brown, 40, and his wife, Karen, 41, both of Orderville, Utah, and teachers at the Navajo Community College at Many Farms, Ariz. Workers at the Palomar Observatory heard the plane circle twice and then crash into a tree along High Point Road and fall into the canyon, according to Robert Thicksten, observatory superintendent. “We knew they were in trouble,” said Thicksten. The crash occurred at 7:45 a.m. but it was 10 o’clock before the wreckage could be found and it was nearly 1 p.m. before a search party of observatory personnel, the Palomar Mountain Volunteer Fire Department and sheriff’s deputies reached the scene. Blowing snow and fog hampered the efforts, Thicksten said.
>
> The Browns had left Arizona last week on a spring vacation trip to Mexico and were expected to return to the Navajo college today, according to Dean Jackson, president of the school. Brown was director of development at the school and his wife taught mathematics, said Jackson. They had visited a friend in North County and were returning to Arizona yesterday when the crash occurred, according to the coroner’s office. Both held private pilot licenses and had been flying for several years, according to friends in Utah.
>
> After the crash, Thicksten and others from the observatory went out to search for the wreckage in the rugged and heavily forested area northwest of the 200-inch telescope at the observatory. “We smelled gas but we couldn’t see anything even though we were within 25 years of it,” said Thicksten. Federal Aviation Administration \investigator Al Matera and Wally Funk, an investigator for the National Transportation Safety Board, who were hampered in getting to the scene by snow and fog, yesterday began a probe to determine the probable cause of the crash.

Cessna 170B
wikipedia

In 1983, Palomar Mountain Views, Volume 11 published [19]:

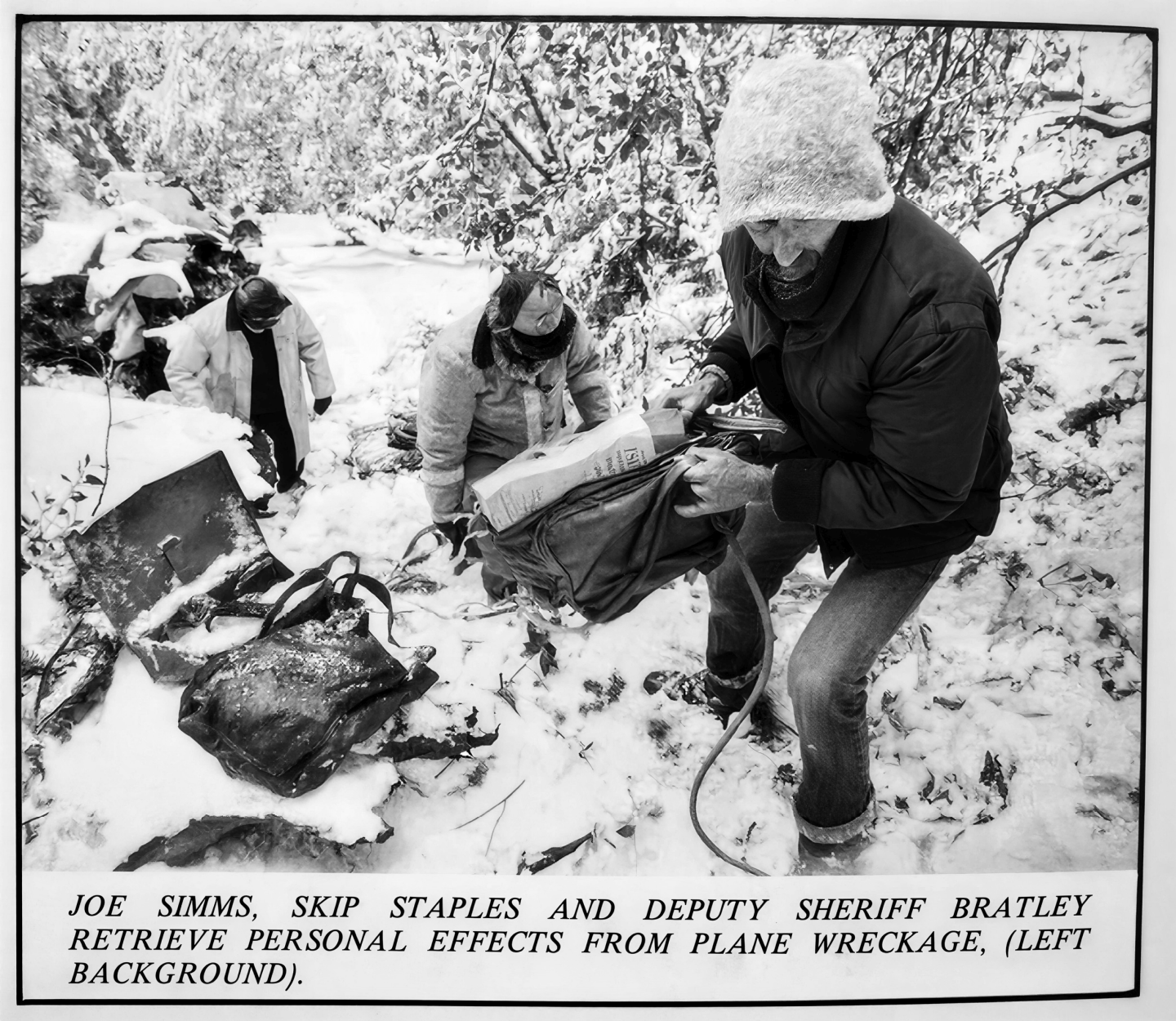
> !! PLANE DOWN ON PALOMAR MOUNTAIN !!
>
> By Skip Staples
>
> 7:05 A.M. March 21st, 1983, a small Cessna 170 B. takes off headed west from Oceanside Municipal Airport. No flight plan has been filed and no one is aware of the take off except the Tower and the two people in the plane. This is the last leg of a trip home from Mexico: Destination Arizona. The plane circles around to the East and heads towards the cloud shrouded mountains.
>
> 7:35 A.M. – Palomar Mountain The fog is so thick that visibility is zero. It is sleeting very hard, and the sound of an airplane overhead is very strange. It appears to be flying very erratically, back and forth, over the observatory grounds.
>
> The sound of the engine is like that of a stunt plane doing loop the loops at a county fair. At approximately 7:39 the engine abruptly stops. There is a cracking sound and then absolute silence.

At 7:40 A.M. I was on the radio to “County Fire,” reporting that there was a plane down on Palomar Mountain near the observatory and visibility was zero with heavy sleet and snow.

The Palomar Volunteer Fire Department was called out and all appropriate agencies were notified ie: National Transportation Safety Board, the F.A.A. and the County Sheriff’s Search & Rescue Team. An immediate search was begun by the observatory crew and volunteer fire department personnel. Fire chief Rick Lobner, assisted by Asst. Chief Harry Schrader, set up a Command Post at the office of the observatory and search teams were dispatched from there.

The plane crashed into a pine tree three feet in diameter, sixty feet above the ground. The emergency transmitter sent a signal immediately and was heard for only a few seconds at Gillispie Field in El Cajon and at Palomar Airport, Carlsbad. Then silence. At 7:45 A.M. five people, including myself, passed within 100 feet of the plane but the fog was so thick we couldn’t see it. Search teams were called into the Command Post at approximately 10 A.M. to await the arrival of a special squad from the Sheriff’s dept. They carry portable signal receivers with them.

Within 15 minutes of their setting up this equipment, triangulation of the emergency signal was obtained and in 20 minutes we had located the downed plane. Our arrival on the scene showed evidence, that was later confirmed by the Coroners office, that the pilot and passenger had, in fact, died on impact.



JOE SIMMS, SKIP STAPLES AND DEPUTY SHERIFF BRATLEY RETRIEVE PERSONAL EFFECTS FROM PLANE WRECKAGE, (LEFT BACKGROUND).

References

1= San Diego Union, May 31, 1944, page 1, column 3
2= Daily Times-Advocate (Escondido), May 31, 1944, page 2, column 4
3= National Museum of the U.S. Navy. Exhibits: Photography / U.S. Navy Aircraft / Aircraft-P / PB4Y: Liberator and Privateer
www.history.navy.mil/content/history/museums/nmusn/explore/photography/aircraft-us/aircraft-usn-p/pb4y-1.html
4= Naval History and Heritage Command. 80-G Series >> 80-G-280000 >> 80-G-287594 General Motors FM-2 "Wildcat" fighter
www.history.navy.mil/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhhc-series/nh-series/NH-89000/NH-89674.html
5= The Tribune-Sun (San Diego), June 1, 1944, page 7, column 3
6= Weekly Times-Advocate (Escondido), January 19, 1951, page 2, column 1
7= Evening Tribune (San Diego), July 29, 1970, page 22, column 1
8= The Tribune (San Diego), November 23, 1988, page 1, column 1 and page 6, column 4
9= San Diego Union-Tribune, May 26, 2018, page 29, column 2 and page 33, column 2
10= Tribute to 1944 Airmen. Bonnie Phelps. 2018. palomarmountainnews.com/2018/05/02/tribute-to-1944-airmen
11= Boeing B-47 Stratojet – Warbird Wednesday Episode #124. Palm Springs Air Museum. palmspringsairmuseum.org/boeing-b-47-stratojet-warbird-wednesday-episode-124
12= Valley Roadrunner, September 5, 2019. www.valleycenter.com/articles/remembering-valley-centers-air-disasters
13= Gaylene Eisenach collection
14= Boeing B-47 Stratojet. All Losses & Ejections. b-47.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Boeing-B-47-Losses-and-Ejections.pdf
15= San Diego Union, December 19, 1957, page 1, column 4
16= Daily Times-Advocate (Escondido), December 24, 1957, page 4, column 3
17= Valley Roadrunner, August 19, 2021. www.valleycenter.com/articles/debris-from-fatal-air-crash-goes-on-display-at-museum
18= San Diego Union, March 22, 1983, page 17, column 1; page 20, column 2
19= Palomar Mountain Views, Volume II. Palomar Mountain Views, 1983. pp. 48-49